

Writing Today

Fifth Edition

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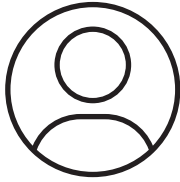
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Preface

As we developed this new edition of *Writing Today*, we found ourselves at a pivotal time in the history of writing. The coronavirus pandemic earlier in the decade changed how people use writing and how we teach writing. More recently, generative artificial intelligence (AI) applications have begun to dramatically change how almost all people, including college writers, approach writing for school and work.

Today, writing in college and the workplace is more multimodal and interactive than ever before. Increasingly, our students need to learn how to write in hybrid and mobile spaces that combine the physical with the virtual. The written word is still the bedrock of learning and work, but the activity we call “writing” is quickly expanding to include new modalities, such as images, video, audio, and virtual reality.

Meanwhile, learning and working remotely have accelerated the evolution of online and hybrid uses of written communication. Within weeks after the coronavirus shutdown, we were meeting, teaching, and learning in videoconferences and other nontraditional spaces. Learning management systems like Canvas, Blackboard, and Brightspace became essential meeting spaces for college learning. Similarly, in the workplace, online platforms like Slack, MS Teams, Google Meet, and Zoom have become central to how we get things done. Each of these technologies centralizes writing in the workplace.

The Potentials of Artificial Intelligence

On top of all this, AI applications are dramatically changing how we write in college, the workplace, and our civic lives. Today, we can type a prompt or question about a topic into an AI application, and it will generate a reasonably thorough and

mechanically correct summation of that topic based on information available on the Internet.

Is this the end of college writing, as pundits have been nervously asking? Well, no, we believe it’s quite the opposite. As the authors of *Writing Today*, we believe college writing is becoming more important and more dynamic than ever. AI applications are indeed capable of synthesizing and paraphrasing the material available on the Internet, but obtaining these skills has never been the primary purpose of college writing. Instead, college writing is about generating new content, being creative, exploring new ideas, understanding our readers, collaborating with others, researching new angles, crafting persuasive arguments, developing an appropriate voice and tone, and designing accessible and appealing documents. AI applications are still a long way from achieving that kind of proficiency with language and design. Truth be told, we’re skeptical computers will ever be able to work at a human level of cognition, but time will tell.

Instead, we believe the introduction of AI to writing is analogous to the introduction of computer-aided design (CAD) software a few decades ago in architecture, animation, construction, engineering, and science. When CAD software first became available, media pundits began asking whether architects, animators, and circuit designers would be needed anymore. They also speculated that even engineers and scientists might no longer be needed because computers would soon be able to design things faster and better than humans.

CAD has indeed revolutionized architecture, animation, construction, engineering, and design, but mostly for the better. By taking over the repetitive, tedious, and time-consuming work of drafting and diagramming, CAD frees up architects, for example, to be more innovative and productive while improving the quality and safety of the buildings they design. Similarly, animators, builders, scientists, engineers, and designers have also

discovered that CAD tools greatly enhance their abilities to do their work faster and better. CAD hasn't replaced them—it has freed them to be more creative and productive than ever before.

Similarly, AI applications will likely take over the mechanical, repetitive, and tedious aspects of writing. Some of the lower-order aspects of writing, such as grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, paragraphing, and proofreading, can be handled by AI applications. Writers can also use AI to brainstorm topics, collect and synthesize sources, and outline documents. AI will be able to critique and review texts, much like peer editors.

AI will help students put their energies toward developing higher-order abilities, such as generating new ideas, building stronger relationships with their readers, researching new angles on topics, crafting persuasive arguments, enhancing their voice and tone, and designing even more accessible and attractive documents. Students will be even more innovative and productive when they are less worried about whether their writing is mechanically “correct.” They will be freer to create, explore, and better express their ideas and beliefs.

Yes, times of pedagogical and technological change like ours can be uncertain and even anxiety provoking, but these times also offer great potential for innovation, revealing new pathways and horizons. As we put the finishing touches on *Writing Today*, 5e, we look forward to these emerging challenges, while trying to capture and express this time of excitement and promise.

Support for Teaching Corequisite Courses

Writing Today, 5e, is also enhanced with *The Corequisite Support Workbook*, a free companion book for students enrolled in corequisite first-year courses. In *The Workbook*, you will find nine Workshops that target learning areas that first-year writing students sometimes struggle with, including college study skills, reading in college, brainstorming, structuring a college paper, sentence and paragraph construction, basic research, and grammar and punctuation.

The Workbook was designed to support first-generation students, many of whom come from underserved communities. These students can be unprepared for college-level work and don't have family or friends to turn to for advice or support. They may struggle with adapting to college life. One of our authors, Professor Johnson-Sheehan, was a first-generation student, and he vividly remembers how disorienting and confusing that first year of college can be.

Corequisite courses “mainstream” these students, placing them in college-level courses and providing the extra help and encouragement they need without delaying their progress. This approach has been shown to double the success rate for these students in English courses, greatly improving their retention in college. *The Corequisite Support Workbook for Writing Today* is designed to help them do well in your class while they pick up the life skills needed to succeed in college and move forward with their college studies.

Welcome to the Fifth Edition

Writing Today has long been a leader in teaching students the genres and rhetorical strategies that will help them succeed in their advanced college courses, their careers, and their civic lives. Since the first edition, this book has foregrounded practical writing skills that are based on solid theoretical, historical, and empirical principles of rhetoric.

With each new edition, we have also kept pace with the evolving cultural and technological trends that affect all our lives. At our core, we still firmly believe in the following three principles that we laid out in the first edition:

1. Students want to master writing skills that will help them be successful in college, their careers, and their civic lives.
2. Students want to learn from a book that presents information clearly, simply, visually, and in a way that is intuitive and easy to access.
3. Writing instructors prefer a textbook and other teaching tools that are practical, flexible, and theoretically sound, allowing them to adapt these tools' content to their own teaching practices and styles.

In this fifth edition, we place more emphasis on the high-order aspects of writing, such as invention, genre, audience, research, argumentation, style, and design. We also continue to emphasize *reflection* as a vital component of writing, critical reading, and analytical thinking. We stress the importance of developing our students' abilities to transfer the ideas and skills they learned in college to the workplace and their lives in society. We also stress the importance of writing and living in a just, equitable, diverse, and inclusive society.

Writing is about crafting clear, accessible, and persuasive messages that shape and influence how others think and behave. Students learn how to use critical reading, analytical thinking, and thoughtful reflection to strengthen their communication skills, so they can become more versatile, resilient, and independent people. Of course, we want students to learn how to compose clear and coherent prose, but more than that, we really want them to develop a deep understanding of their motives, their readers' motives, their values, and why they and others express themselves and behave in specific ways.

Writing Today is an easy-to-use book that fits the way today's students read and learn. Students respond best to an interactive writing style, so the chapters are brief and to the point. Key terms are immediately defined and reinforced. Sections and paragraphs are kept short to make them accessible. Important points are clearly labeled and supported by helpful visuals. We emphasize practical application and keep the academic explanations to a minimum, even though *Writing Today* is thoroughly grounded in contemporary theories of rhetoric and writing.

We also maximize pedagogical flexibility for instructors. Our own experiences as writing teachers and writing program administrators tell us that instructors can follow a variety of pathways. The best books on college writing speak to the diversity of instructors, helping them be creative and innovative. With *Writing Today*, instructors can choose the order in which they teach the chapters and combine them into units that fit their course designs.

Our approach is informed by our own classroom experience and by much of the research done in the field of writing studies over the past 30 years.

This approach is also supported by findings emerging from our research with the Consortium for the Study of Writing in College (a collaboration between the National Survey of Student Engagement and the Council of Writing Program Administrators). Surveys conducted since 2008 by the CSWC of hundreds of thousands of students at over 200 different schools found that when faculty assigned challenging and diverse writing assignments, students reported deeper learning, increased practical competence, and greater personal and social gains.

What's New in the Fifth Edition

A New Part 3 that Teaches Career-Related Genres.

Writing Today has always featured genres for both college and careers, but we have now sorted them into a Part 2, "Genres for Writing in College," and Part 3, "Genres for Writing in Your Career." We added more chapters to each part. This will help students smoothly transfer their written communication skills from college to workplace settings.

Coverage of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Applications.

The emergence of AI as a tool for assisting writing is now embedded in almost every chapter of the book. While encouraging students to ask their professors for permission, we offer suggestions about how students might use AI without resorting to plagiarism or academically dishonest practices. The fraught line between using AI to assist with writing and using computers to generate prose is discussed in several chapters.

Expanding Reflection in Reading, Writing, and Analytical Thinking.

Almost all chapters in the book address reflection as an important component of written communication. Students are encouraged to step back and look at their work critically while reflecting on how their writing embodies their own motives, values, and cultures.

New Chapter on Literacy Narratives.

A new Chapter 6 builds on a popular genre in which students can explore their own successes and struggles with literacy, including digital literacy.

New Chapter on Explainers. Students and instructors were having so much fun and learning so much with this microgenre in the fourth edition that we turned it into a full genre chapter. Brief reports that answer questions readers want to understand, explainers are becoming central documents in many fields, especially science, technology, engineering, medicine, journalism, marketing, and health care.

New Chapter on Photo Essays. This chapter has been so popular in one of our other books, *Argument Today*, 2e, that we decided to bring it over to *Writing Today*. Your students will enjoy learning how to do a multimodal project that involves photography and writing.

New Chapter on Résumés and Career Materials. Increasingly, colleges and universities are asking students to prepare the first versions of their résumés, letters of application, and portfolios early in their college careers. This chapter shows students how these documents can be used during their time in college to find internships, scholarships, fellowships, co-ops, and financial aid.

Expanded Chapter on Essay Exams. The chapter on essay exams in *Writing Today* has been transformed into an entire genre chapter on strategies for writing these important documents. Instructors told us that the use of essay exams and short-answer exams is growing, so that topic was elevated, expanded, and moved earlier in the book. We believe AI will make essay exams even more critical as a form of assessment.

Improved Page and Interface Design. Instructors who have used *Writing Today* before will notice the continuing improvement in design, which is brighter and more open, colorful, and accessible. Students will appreciate a new design that grabs their attention and works well with both the print and eText versions.

Enhanced Coverage of Citing Sources. In Part 6, “Doing Research,” and elsewhere, we pay even more attention to properly citing sources and

avoiding plagiarism. The ever-evolving Internet, as we all know, is always creating new challenges with the citation of sources. We incorporate new methods and new technologies to help students manage and cite their sources properly while avoiding plagiarism.

New Student-Written Examples. Many of the student examples in Parts 2 and 3 have been changed out. Instructors and students will enjoy the examples we retained, and the new examples will give them fresh ideas about how to write more effectively.

New Microgenre Examples. We have replaced many of the microgenre examples with new examples that students will enjoy reading, discussing, and modeling. New and exciting microgenres appear in the added genre chapters.

New Engaging and Affective Readings. More than 15 new readings will foster lively class discussions and offer a range of topics students might consider for their own writing. These topics range across diversity and equity, the Second Amendment, fast food, conspiracy theories, the electoral college, social media, climate change, global public health, and popular culture.

Features of This Book

Interactive Writing Style. The instruction is brief and to the point. Key concepts are immediately defined and reinforced. Paragraphs are short and introduced by heads that preview content. This interactive style helps students skim, ask questions, and access information when they are ready for it—putting them in control of their learning.

At-A-Glance Diagrams. Each chapter in Part 2 opens with a diagram that shows one or two common ways to organize a genre’s key elements, giving an immediate and visual orientation to the genre. Students learn to adapt this organization to suit their rhetorical situation as they read the chapter.

End-of-Chapter Activities. Exercises conclude every chapter in the book to help students understand and practice concepts and strategies.

- **Talk About This** questions prompt classroom discussion.
- **Try This Out** exercises suggest informal writing activities students can complete in class or as homework.
- **Explore This** lets students find their own microgenres and explore how they are used in public spaces.
- **Write This** prompts facilitate longer, formal writing assignments.

“One Student’s Work” Readings. A student-written example in each chapter of Parts 2 and 3 shows the kinds of issues students might explore in a specific genre of writing as well as the angles they might take. Annotations highlight the writer’s key rhetorical decisions so the reading can be used either for discussion or as a model.

Quick Start Guides. This practical review includes action steps and appears in each chapter to get students writing quickly. Students spend less time reading about writing and more time working on their own compositions. They can also use the Quick Start Guide as a preview to gain familiarity with a genre before reading the chapter.

Microgenres. A microgenre applies features of major genres to narrow rhetorical situations. For example, in Chapter 13, students apply the results of an annotated biography in a research paper; in Chapter 6, those of a literacy memoir to a digital-literacy narrative. Each microgenre in Part 2 includes a description, an example, and a writing activity, encouraging students to experiment and play by stretching genre conventions.

Readings and Prompts. A diverse selection of sample readings in each genre chapter and other chapters throughout the book offer models of each genre. Question sets after each reading encourage critical engagement.

- **A Closer Look** questions facilitate analytical reading.

- **Ideas for Writing** questions prompt responses, analyses, and different genres of writing.
- **A Multimodal Approach.** Today’s writers compose electronic texts, work with visual and audio tools, insert graphics, and collaborate with others online. Each chapter includes strategies for working in a multimodal environment. Multimodal assignments appear in “Write This” activities. Chapters in Part 5 offer guidance on creating and posting compositions in online environments.

Active Learning Opportunities. The activities in *The Corequisite Support Workbook for Writing Today* help students fill in the gaps as they develop their writing process.

How This Book Is Organized

Writing Today features brief chapters and plainly labeled sections, creating obvious access points that help students find what they need when they need it.

PART 1

Getting Started

Purposefully brief, the first four chapters are designed to get students up and running right away. They introduce the five elements of rhetorical situations (topic, angle, purpose, readers, and context) and explain why and how using genres will help students to write successfully. The fourth chapter teaches strategies for reading critically and thinking analytically. Enhancements to Chapter 5 give instructors the ability to introduce reflection as part of the writing process early in the course and help students set up their writing portfolios.

PART 2

Genres for Writing in College

These chapters help students learn eight commonly assigned kinds of writing in their college courses. Students explore expressive, informative, analytical, persuasive, and argumentative genres that help them respond effectively to most academic writing situations.

PART 3

Genres for Writing in Your Career

These chapters help students learn five genres that are regularly used in the workplace. Two new

genres, the explainer and the photo essay, are popular and challenging in new ways. The chapters on the professional report and résumé and career materials are designed to help students start thinking early in their college careers about the skills they will need in their professional careers and civic lives.

PART 4

Developing Your Own Writing Process

Stand-alone chapters on planning, organization, style, design, and revision offer strategies students can apply to any writing situation. Instructors can assign them alongside the genre chapters.

PART 5

Strategies for Shaping Ideas

Today's students have more opportunities to present their work publicly than ever before. Straightforward chapters on drafting introductions and conclusions, developing paragraphs and sections, and incorporating rhetorical strategies (such as narration, classification, and comparison and contrast) provide resources for writing those sections of papers where students often find themselves stuck. A chapter on argument explores appeals and fallacies, and a chapter on collaboration helps students work effectively in groups. Students learn how to present their ideas in public and on the Internet.

PART 6

Doing Research

The ability to research effectively is critical to students' success in college and in their careers. Students learn to engage in inquiry-driven research, evaluate sources, and work with sources by paraphrasing, quoting, and synthesizing. Up-to-date coverage of MLA and APA styles includes citation examples and model papers.

Ways to Fit This Book to Your Teaching Approach

Flexibility is a chief strength of *Writing Today*. The first five chapters form a foundation, but the remaining chapters and *The Corequisite Support*

Workbook can be taught in any order or combination to suit individual teaching approaches and objectives.

A Process Approach. Students want to learn a writing process that suits their own working habits and writing styles. The chapters in Parts 2 and 3 tailor the writing process with strategies specific to different genres. Part 4, "Developing Your Own Writing Process," provides additional chapters on prewriting, drafting, designing, revising, and editing that can be assigned with any project.

A Genre-Based Approach. Genres are tools writers can use to help them invent ideas and plan, research and draft, design, and edit. *Writing Today* covers real-world writing—such as analyses, reviews, explainers, photo essays, professional reports, and proposals—that helps students solve real problems and achieve specific goals.

A Transfer and Reflection Approach. The skills and knowledge students learn from *Writing Today* will "transfer" to their advanced courses and their careers. Students will also learn how to "reflect" on the rhetorical choices they make. Chapter 5, "Reflecting Critically, Starting Your Portfolio" offers a foundation for transfer and reflection. Then, throughout *Writing Today*, students are encouraged to consider the numerous choices they make as they write often without conscious awareness.

A Purposes or Aims-Based Approach. Instructors who teach an aims approach to writing encourage students to be aware of their audience and purpose as they write to express, inform, analyze, or persuade. This approach works hand-in-hand with a genre-based approach.

A Strategies or Patterns-Based Approach. Instructors who teach rhetorical patterns (narrative, description, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, etc.), will find them embedded in this book. Part 5, "Strategies for Shaping Ideas," shows how strategies work with and within genres to help students organize and shape their ideas. Students also learn how to use common patterns in multimodal texts that use video, audio, and in-person communication.

An Academic Approach. Students learn the kinds of writing common in the general education curriculum, such as narratives, rhetorical analyses, literary analyses, reviews, and argument essays. They also learn the foundations of the kinds of writing common in advanced academic classes, such as profiles, commentaries, reports, and proposals.

An Argument-Based Approach. *Writing Today* presents a rhetorical approach to writing. Several genres in Part 2, such as rhetorical analyses, commentaries, arguments, and proposals, are purposefully designed to be argument-based; this content is labeled with ARGUMENT in the table of contents. Chapter 27, “Using Argumentative Strategies,” helps students determine what is arguable and anticipate opposing points of view.

An Integrated, Multimodal Approach. Instructors teaching multimodal composition courses know few writing guides teach critical twenty-first-century composing skills and even fewer that offer multimodal assignments. *Writing Today* offers strategies for writers to plan and collaborate online, include visuals in print texts, create visual texts, create media projects, and post compositions to the web.

A Scaffolded Approach. Teaching with the workshops in *The Corequisite Support Workbook* helps instructors target learning areas that first-year writing students sometimes struggle with. In each one, you will find a variety of activities that will help them master specific writing skills. They cover a range of topics, from grammar to invention to “doing college,” to develop various skills, from critical reading to writing stronger sentences to doing research to support writing.

Distance Learning and Online Teaching. *Writing Today* was designed to be easily adaptable to online and hybrid learning environments. The book’s comprehensiveness and flexibility provide strong scaffolding on which distance learning, online, and hybrid courses can be developed. Its highly accessible design allows students to quickly find the information they need while learning on their own and composing on their computers.

Correlation to the Revised (2014) WPA Outcomes Statement

Writing Today helps teachers and students address learning outcomes for first-year composition courses identified by the Council of Writing Program Administrators: rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, reading, and writing; processes; knowledge of conventions; and composing in electronic environments. Both of us have been leaders in this organization, and we believe strongly that these outcomes reflect the kinds of abilities that students should master in these courses. Specific connections between chapters and the WPA Outcomes appear in the Instructor’s Manual.

Writing Today 5/e in Pearson+

Pearson+ is Pearson’s new subscription-based eText platform. With Pearson+ students get flexible, affordable access to Pearson eTextbooks. Students can search, add notes and highlights, create flashcards, and get audio for most titles. Pearson+ works on any device and allows for offline reading right in the app. Learn more at Pearson.com.

Supplements

Pearson is pleased to offer the following resources to qualified adopters of *Writing Today*:

- **INSTRUCTOR’S RESOURCE MANUALS** Create a comprehensive roadmap for teaching classroom, online, or hybrid courses. Designed for new and experienced instructors, the Instructor’s Resource Manual for *Writing Today* includes learning objectives, lecture and discussion suggestions, activities for in or out of class, research activities, participation activities, suggested readings, series, and films. A separate Instructor’s Resource Manual provides suggestions for how to teach corequisite courses using *The Corequisite Support Workbook*.
- **ANSWER KEY** Answers to the workshop activities in *The Corequisite Support Workbook* for *Writing Today* are also available.
- **POWERPOINT PRESENTATION** The in-class slide presentation includes a full lecture outline and photos and figures from the textbook.

Supplements are available for instant download at Pearson.com. Select the “I’m an Educator” option and search for “Writing Today.” Once at the *Writing Today* page, select the “Instructor Resources” tab towards the bottom of the page.

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Charles Paine is a Professor of English at the University of New Mexico, where for more than fifteen years he directed the Core Writing and the Rhetoric and Writing programs. He teaches first-year composition and courses in writing pedagogy, the history of rhetoric and composition, and other areas. His published books span a variety of topics in rhetoric and composition, including *The Resistant Writer* (a history of composition studies), *Teaching with Student Texts* (a co-edited collection of essays on teaching writing), and *Argument Today* (an argument-based textbook). An active member of the Council of Writing Program Administrators, he has served on its Executive Board and served as co-leader of the WPA Summer Conference Workshop.

He co-founded and coordinates the Consortium for the Study of Writing in College, a joint effort of the National Survey of Student Engagement and the Council of Writing Program Administrators. The Consortium conducts general research into the ways that undergraduate writing can lead to enhanced learning, engagement, and other gains related to student success.

Chapter 1

Writing with Genres



In this chapter, you will learn how to—

- 1.1** describe what genres are and how they help writers and readers communicate.
- 1.2** use genres to communicate with readers.
- 1.3** develop a writing process that will help you write efficiently and effectively.
- 1.4** use “genre know-how” to become a versatile writer in college and in the workplace.

Writing gives you the power to get things done with words and images. Clear and persuasive writing allows you to respond successfully to the people and events around you, whether you are trying to complete an assignment in college, pitch a new idea at work, strengthen your community, or just text with your friends.

The emergence of new writing situations—new places for writing, new readers, and new media—means writing today involves more than just getting words and images onto a page or screen. Writers need to react to a wide variety of situations that include diverse groups of people and rapidly changing technologies. Learning to navigate among these complex situations is the real challenge of writing in today’s world.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is also creating new opportunities for writing to evolve and progress. When used responsibly, AI-assisted software applications will make some aspects of writing easier, such as finding information, outlining documents, editing for style, grammar, and punctuation, and designing documents. It may also help you generate ideas for getting started with a writing project.

AI-assisted writing, however, will also create new challenges. Although it can be used in creative ways, AI-assisted writing cannot replace your own creativity or critical thinking. You should always make sure the information generated by AI is accurate by using other research methods such as books, journals, and reputable websites. You also need to read and cite any sources found by AI that you are incorporating into your work. Before using an AI tool, ask your professors if they approve its use or approve only specific kinds of uses.

Writing gives you the power to analyze what’s happening around you, think critically, express your ideas clearly, and persuade others. Today, being able to communicate effectively is vital to your success in college and in your career. In this book, you will learn to use powerful communication tools that will be key to your success.

What Are Genres?

1.1 Describe what genres are and how they help writers and readers communicate.

Writing Today uses a *genre-based approach* to writing that is easy to learn and incredibly powerful. Defining the word *genre* is difficult. Sometimes, genres are defined by their structure alone (e.g., “A report has five major sections: introduction, methods, results, discussion, and conclusion”). But this understanding of genre is rather simplistic. Genres are not fixed or rigid patterns to be followed mechanically. Genres are not templates into which we insert sentences and paragraphs.

Genres are ways of writing and speaking that help people interact, communicate, and work together. In other words, genres reflect the ways people take action and get things done. They are always evolving because human activities change over time to suit new social situations and emerging challenges. Genres *do* offer stable patterns for responding to typical situations, but those patterns are highly flexible. More importantly, though, genres reflect how people act, react, and interact in these situations. Genres are meeting places where writers and their readers connect with each other. They are also *meaning* places, because genres are places where writers and readers make meaning together.

Using Genres to Write Successfully

1.2 Use genres to communicate with readers.

Genres are powerful because they show you how people interact with each other. You can use genres to analyze and interpret what is happening around you. Then, once you understand your current situation, you can use a genre to focus your creativity, generate new ideas, and present your ideas to others.

When you are reading, you also use genres. A genre provides you cues about how to orient yourself to a text. Once you recognize the genre of a text, it can help you anticipate what you are likely to find in a document and how you can use the information in it. Whether you are reading or writing a text, recognizing its genre can help you make strategic choices about what information is most important, where that information is placed, and how style and design make that information easy to understand and visually appealing. We like to say that the ability to recognize genres gives you “genre know-how.” Genre know-how gives you the ability to get things done with words and images (Figure 1.1).

Recognizing genres also gives you the opportunity to use AI-assisted writing software more effectively. When you know which genre or genres fit your writing project, you can ask AI applications to specifically locate the kind of information that is most relevant to that genre, while helping you organize that information strategically.

Genres in Movies

How do genres work? To answer this question, let's talk about how genres work in movies (Figure 1.2). You already know that movie genres include action flicks, murder mysteries, superhero origin stories, romantic comedies, musicals, science fiction, fantasy adventures, horror, thrillers, and others. Before you even begin watching the movie, you already know what to expect because you recognize the genre. These genres, however, aren't formulas that the writers and directors must follow. Instead, they are familiar patterns that audiences will recognize and understand.

Once you recognize the genre of a movie, you form specific expectations about what kinds of things you will—and will not—experience while watching it. For example, a romantic comedy usually explores the amusing awkwardness and screw-ups of a new relationship. Two people meet and feel an attraction to each other. But then misunderstandings or events beyond their control cause silly arguments or embarrassing situations. Eventually, the two star-crossed lovers realize they do truly love each other and find a way at the end of the movie to be together.

Figure 1.1 College Writing Requires Genre Know-How

Writing matters because it is one way people get things done. College writing will teach you “genre know-how,” the ability to size up writing situations and respond to them appropriately.



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Figure 1.2 Movie Genres

Usually, moviegoers recognize the genre of a movie even before they step into the theater. Movie studios use posters and previews to help audiences know what to expect and how to interpret the movie.



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BFA/ Alamy Stock Photo



iam21 Entertainment/Album/Alamy Stock Photo



WARNER BROS./Album/Alamy Stock Photo

Directors of successful romantic comedies also use genres to help them work creatively and produce a film that is familiar but also fresh. Genres aid the scriptwriters' and directors' creativity by providing guidelines about how the movie should be structured, scripted, visually designed, musically scored, and even edited.

The genre of a movie helps the director and producers figure out its content, organization, style, and design. It gives people watching the film a good sense of what the movie will be about and its basic story. One of the main reasons why some movies flop is because they don't follow a familiar genre—the audience just doesn't “get it.” Movies can also flop when they follow a genre in a formulaic way, making them painfully predictable and shallow.

Successful directors, like successful writers, first need to understand the genres of the movies they are making. The genre helps the director figure out where to start and how to proceed. Meanwhile, a director will usually stretch or play with the genre to make the movie fresh and new. As a writer, you can do this too. Once you know the genre of a text you need to write, you can be creative with it, stretching it and balancing the familiar and stable with the unique and dynamic.

Writing with Genres

Here are the most important things to remember about genres:

GENRES ARE FLEXIBLE. Genres are as flexible and changeable as the human activities they represent. They aren't formulas to be followed mechanically. Instead, you can bend or stretch the genre to fit your specific topic, purpose, and readers.

GENRES ARE ADAPTABLE TO VARIOUS SITUATIONS. When your readers or context changes, the genre you are using needs to be adjusted to suit the new situation. An argument that worked previously with some readers or in a particular context might not work with different readers or in another context.

GENRES EVOLVE TO SUIT VARIOUS FIELDS. Each discipline and discourse community adapts common genres to its own needs and purposes. A report written by a biologist, for example, will be similar to a report written by a manager at a corporation, but there will also be important differences in the content, organization, style, and design of the text. Genres can be adapted to many different situations and workplaces.

GENRES SHAPE SITUATIONS AND READERS. When you choose a particular genre, you are deciding what kinds of issues will be highlighted and what role your readers will play. For instance, people know that when they are reading a memoir (a literary genre), they should read thoroughly and follow the storyline. Quite differently, when readers are looking over a business proposal (a workplace genre), they assume that they can “raid” the document for the specific information they need—in other words, they can skip and skim.

GENRES CAN BE PLAYED WITH. You can be creative and play with the conventions of genres. You can combine, blend, or even “mash up” genres into new ones. Genres are stretchy. But when you stretch or bend a genre in a way that might not fit your readers' expectations, you need to do so consciously and with a specific purpose in mind.

Genres and the Writing Process

1.3 Develop a writing process that will help you write efficiently and effectively.

So how can genres help you write better? Think of something you are already good at. To do something well, you first needed to learn the *process* for doing it. Someone else—perhaps a teacher, coach, parent, or friend—showed you the process and helped you get better at it (Figure 1.3).

Writing is similar to the other activities you enjoy. To write well, you first need to learn a reliable writing process with help from your professors. Strong writers aren't born with a special gift, and they aren't necessarily smarter than anyone else. Strong writers have simply mastered a reliable writing process that allows them to generate new ideas and shape those ideas into something readers will find interesting and useful.

Using a Writing Process

Over time, you will develop your own unique writing process, but the following six steps work well as a starting place:

ANALYZE THE RHETORICAL SITUATION. Define your topic, state your purpose, and analyze your readers and the contexts in which your text will be read or used. If approved by your professor you can use the Internet or AI applications to better understand your topic and find out what your readers want and need, as well as the places or situations in which they will use your document.

INVENT YOUR IDEAS. Use inquiry and research to generate your own ideas and discover what others already know about your topic. You can use the Internet, books, articles, interviews, and surveys to generate content and blend together what you and others know about this topic. If your professor approves, you might use AI software to also generate ideas that you can use in your papers.

Figure 1.3 Learning to Do Something Involves Learning a Process

To do something you enjoy, you first had to learn a step-by-step process for doing it. Once you mastered the process and it became second nature, you could make it yours by refining and adapting it.



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ORGANIZE AND DRAFT YOUR PAPER. Use your understanding of the genre you're working with to arrange and compose your ideas into familiar patterns that your readers will recognize and find useful. If approved by your instructor, you might use an AI application to generate suggestions for structuring your ideas in ways that will be more accessible and clear for your readers.

CHOOSE AN APPROPRIATE STYLE. Use techniques of plain and persuasive style to clarify your writing and make it more compelling. In this book, you will learn time-tested strategies for writing plainly and persuasively. Meanwhile, AI applications can help you revise your writing to make it more clear and consistent.

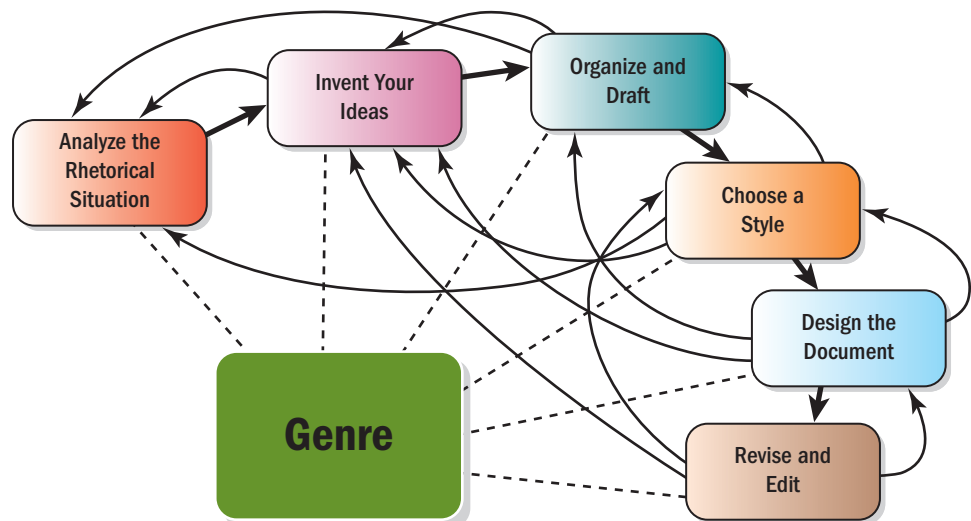
DESIGN YOUR DOCUMENT. Develop an appropriate page layout and use visual or audio features to make your ideas more accessible and attractive to readers. AI applications can help you develop designs that will work with your specific readers.

REVISE AND EDIT YOUR WORK. Improve your writing by rewriting, reorganizing, editing, and proofreading your work. Correctness is even more important now that AI is available to assist you. Readers will expect documents to be well-organized, clear, and error free.

Experienced writers tend to handle each of these steps separately, but a writing process shouldn't be followed mechanically from one step to the next. Instead, experienced writers tend to move around among these steps as needed (Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4 A Writing Process

Good writers tend to go through steps as they develop their work. They move among these steps in ways that fit their own work habits and personalities.



Why bother with a writing process at all? This is one of those “work smarter, not harder” kinds of things. A reliable writing process helps you better figure out what you need to do. In the long run, following a writing process will save you time and will help you to write with more confidence and creativity.

Using Genre as a Guiding Concept

The genre you are using will influence each stage of your writing process, as shown in Figure 1.4. For example, if you are writing a movie review, the “review genre” (discussed in Chapter 8, “Reviews”) will help you make decisions about what kinds of information your readers will expect. Should you tell them the plot of the movie? Should you describe the characters? Should you spoil the ending?

The genre will provide you with a model, so you can arrange your ideas in a pattern that your readers will expect. The genre will also help you to make informed decisions about what kinds of style and document design would work for your review.

The purpose of a genre is to help you figure out how people tend to act, react, and interact in the situation in which you are writing. So if you tell your readers you are writing a “movie review,” they will have some predictable expectations about the content, organization, style, and design of your text. Your job, as a writer, is to meet your readers halfway. You want to meet their expectations as much as possible, while also presenting your argument in a way that will help you achieve your own purpose.

Transfer: Using Genres in College and in Your Career

1.4 Use “genre know-how” to become a versatile writer in college and in the workplace.

The genre-based approach to writing might be new to you, but it’s really just the next step toward preparing you to succeed in college and in your career. By learning how to use the genres in this book, you will develop *genre know-how*, the practical knowledge and skill to write effectively for a variety of purposes and situations. You will learn how to recognize and adapt genres for your own needs, and you will learn how to use this genre know-how to adjust your writing for unique situations and specific readers.

In other words, the communication skills you learn in this book will “transfer” to your advanced classes and to your career. Now is a good time to practice the genres you will need to be a successful and versatile writer. Now is also a good time to get good at using AI applications responsibly to help you generate information, organize information into genres that your readers will recognize, write clearly and persuasively, and design documents to make them accessible and attractive.

Quick Start Guide

At the end of each chapter in this book, you will find something called the “Quick Start Guide.” The purpose of the Quick Start Guides is to help you get up and running as soon as possible. You can use these guides for review or to preview the essential information in the chapter. Here is the essential information in this chapter.

Know what a genre is. Genres are ways of writing and speaking that help people communicate and work together in specific situations. Genres offer relatively stable patterns for writing, but more importantly, they reflect how humans act, react, and interact in everyday situations. Genres are meeting places—and *meaning* places.

Develop your “genre know-how.” Genre know-how is the ability to use genres to analyze and interpret what is happening around you. With this how-to knowledge, you will be able to adapt your writing to new situations and to focus your creativity, generate new ideas, and present those ideas to others.

Keep in mind that genres are flexible. Genres are as flexible and changeable as the human activities they represent. They need to be adjusted to suit the always evolving situations you’ll encounter in college and your career. They can be stretched, blended, and messed around with to fit unique situations.

Develop your writing process. A writing process leads you from your basic idea to a finished document, from inventing ideas to final editing. Developing and refining your writing process will save you time and effort in the long run.

Use genres in college and in your career. A genre-based approach to writing helps you master a “genre set” that will transfer to your advanced college courses and to the workplace. The genre set taught in this book will cover most of the texts you will write in college and in your career.

Activities for Genres

Talk About This

1. With a group of people in your class, have everyone talk briefly about their favorite movie genres; then, as a group, choose one of those genres to discuss. Describe the genre and its common features.
2. In your group, brainstorm a list of all the television shows or streaming series you can think of. Then divide these shows and series into genres. What features did you use to sort them into categories? How do the producers follow and bend the genres to come up with something new?
3. With your group, brainstorm a list of all the restaurant genres you can think of. Then choose one restaurant genre to explore further. How does the genre of the restaurant encourage specific kinds of behavior from its employees and its customers?

Try This Out

1. On the Internet, find a webpage or website that conforms to a familiar website genre. To your professor, write a one-page analysis that describes the website and explains its genre and how that genre works.
2. When a movie uses the well-known features of a genre to make fun of that genre, it's called a *parody*. Write a one-page description of a movie that parodies a particular genre (the genre it makes fun of) and the features of the genre that are specifically played with or overemphasized by the parody.
3. For five minutes, use freewriting to describe how you feel about your favorite movie or television show and what you like about it. Freewriting means just putting your pen on the paper (or your fingers on the keyboard) and writing anything that comes to mind. Then, in your group, discuss what you wrote in your freewrite.
4. Consider a kind of writing activity that you are good at (e.g., texting, e-mail, essays, poetry, short stories). What kind of content is typical in this kind of writing? How is that content organized? What kind of language is used? In what ways does the genre determine the content, organization, and style in this kind of writing?
5. Using an AI application to help you, create a concept for a movie that blends two different genres. For example, you might prompt the AI application to reinvent a horror story as a romantic comedy or to recreate a history documentary as a superhero movie. Save the text generated by the AI application. Then, in a one-page paper written for your professor, write a discussion of how blending these two genres might offer some creative opportunities for coming up with a new kind of movie.

Write This

1. **Analyze a genre.** Find a longer nonfiction document that seems to be using a specific genre. Write a two-page analysis in which you describe the document's content, organization, style, and design.
2. **Review a movie for a website or blog.** Write a three-page review of a movie that you could post on a blog or movie review website. In your review, identify the genre of the movie and the common characteristics of that genre. Then show your readers how the movie exhibits those characteristics. Toward the end of your review, tell your readers whether you think the movie is successful by discussing how well it works within its genre.